

## **Medicare for All Remarks**

### **September 13, 2017**

Let me thank our guests for joining us this afternoon.

Let me thank my Senate colleagues for being here and for their co-sponsorship of this historic Medicare-for-all legislation.

Let me thank all of you who came out to be with us here on Capitol Hill and the many people from coast to coast who are viewing this event via live stream.

Today, we stand before you and proudly proclaim our belief that healthcare in America must be a right not a privilege.

Today, we begin the long and difficult struggle to end the international disgrace of the United States, our great nation, being the only major country on earth not to guarantee health care to all its people. As proud Americans, our job is to lead the world on health care, not woefully lag behind other countries.

Today, we begin the debate, vital to the future of our economy, as to why it is that the United States spends almost twice as much per capita on health care as any other nation on earth, despite the fact that 28 million Americans remain uninsured and even more are underinsured with high deductibles and co-payments. As a result of the incredible waste, bureaucracy, and profiteering in our dysfunctional health care system, we are now spending nearly 18% of our GDP on health care, \$10,000 per person. Incredibly, if we retain the status quo, we will spend an estimated \$49 trillion over the next decade on health care. That is economically unsustainable for our country.

Today we say the function of a rational health care system is to provide quality care to all in a cost-effective way not to continue a system which allows insurance companies and drug companies to make hundreds of billions in profits each year and make health care industry CEOs extremely wealthy. Further, the function of a good health care system is to enable people to get the health care they need when they need it, not to deal with an endless amount of paperwork and to spend hour after hour arguing with insurance companies about whether or not you have coverage for the procedure that you need. The strengths of Medicare for All are not only its universality and its cost-effectiveness—it also ends the complexity of a system which adds enormous stress at a time when people need it the least.

And today we say to those families in Vermont, Wisconsin, California and across the country who are spending 10, 15 or 20 thousand dollars a year on health insurance that we understand this is an insane and unaffordable amount of money to be spending simply to protect the wellbeing of your family. And we're here to tell you that under Medicare for All the average American family will be much better off financially than under the current system because you will no longer be writing checks to your private insurance company. While, depending on your income, your taxes may go up to pay for this publicly funded program, that expense will be more than offset by the money you are saving by the elimination of private insurance costs.

And today we tell the drug companies that the American people are sick and tired of their greed, and that we will not continue paying, by far, the highest prices in the world for the medicine we need. Under Medicare for All, like every other major country on earth, we're going to negotiate drug prices with the pharmaceutical industry and every American, regardless of income, will be able to afford the medicine they need.

And today we say to the business community, especially small and medium size businesses, that we understand that you want to focus on your core business mission, not to spend countless hours worrying about how you will provide health insurance to your workers. And Medicare for All will allow you to do that because all of your employees, by right, will have comprehensive health care.

And today we say to millions of workers that you should not have to be stuck in a job that you don't want, just because it provides decent health care for your family. With health care as a right, you will finally have the freedom to do the work you love and are passionate about – and our economy and our nation will gain from that.

52 years ago, President Lyndon Johnson signed historic legislation that said that in the United States of America, if you are 65 or older, you will be guaranteed health care as a right. And that legislation, Medicare, has been enormously successful. Seniors in America are healthier, happier, and more secure than before the passage of Medicare. And today we tell our seniors that as good as Medicare is, we have heard your concerns and, for the first time, we will expand coverage to include dental care, hearing aids and vision needs.

Let us be honest: the crisis we are discussing today is not really about health care. It is a political crisis which speaks to the incredible power of the insurance companies, the drug companies, and all those who make billions off of the current system. Over the years, they have done everything that they can to prevent us from having lower-priced prescription drugs and universal health care. As one example, since 1998, the pharmaceutical industry has spent over \$3.6 billion in lobbying and hundreds of millions of dollars in campaign contributions.

I fully recognize that legislation which deals with one-sixth of our economy and over three trillion dollars is complex and that nobody, including those of us who are up here, have all the answers. Unlike the Republican leadership, which tried to pass massive and destructive health care reform without one public hearing, our job now is to take this legislation to every state in the country. We want to hear from doctors, hospitals, patient advocates and ordinary citizens as to how we can make this bill even stronger and more effective. We want to hear from the American people as to the fairest ways that we can fund this program.

But to my Republican colleagues, please don't lecture us on health care. In the last few months, you have shown the American people what you stand for, when you voted for legislation to throw 32 million Americans off of the health insurance they currently have, while giving huge tax breaks to the rich and large corporations. Your credibility on health care is non-existent.

Let me conclude by telling you that I am proud that we now have the support here in Congress of 17 US Senators and a whole lot of folks in the House. And, importantly, we also have the strong

support of dozens and dozens of grassroots organizations and trade unions representing the working people of this country. They know, as I do, that this struggle will ultimately not be won here on Capitol Hill, but through grassroots activism all across this country. The reality is, that when millions of Americans stand up and fight back, when they become engaged politically, there is nothing that will stop us and we will finally do what we should have accomplished decades ago, and that is to provide quality health care to every man, woman, and child in this country as a right.